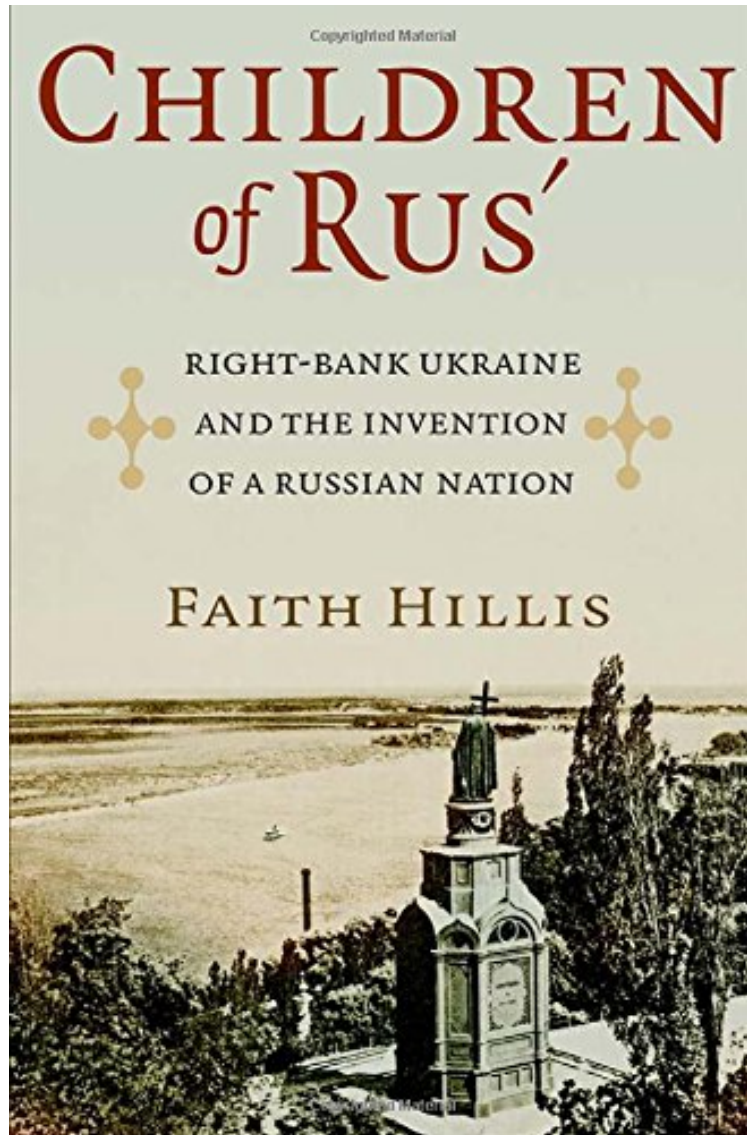


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Children of Rus': Right-Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation

Faith Hillis

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In *Children of Rus'*, Faith Hillis recovers an all but forgotten chapter in the history of the tsarist empire and its southwestern borderlands. The right bank, or west side, of the Dnieper River—which today is located at the heart of the independent state of Ukraine—was one of the Russian empire's last territorial acquisitions, annexed only in the late eighteenth century. Yet over the course of the long nineteenth century, this newly acquired region nearly a thousand miles from Moscow and St. Petersburg generated a powerful Russian nationalist movement. Claiming to restore the ancient customs of the East Slavs, the southwest's Russian nationalists sought to empower the ordinary Orthodox residents of the borderlands and to diminish the influence of their non-Orthodox minorities. Right-bank Ukraine would seem unlikely terrain to nourish a Russian nationalist imagination. It was among the empire's most diverse corners, with few of its residents speaking Russian as their native language or identifying with the culture of the Great Russian interior. Nevertheless, as Hillis shows, by the late nineteenth century, Russian nationalists had established a strong foothold in the southwest's culture and educated society; in the first decade of the twentieth, they secured a leading role in local mass politics. By 1910, with help from sympathetic officials in St. Petersburg, right-bank activists expanded their sights beyond the borderlands, hoping to spread their nationalizing agenda across the empire. Exploring why and how the empire's southwestern borderlands produced its most organized and politically successful Russian nationalist movement, Hillis puts forth a bold new interpretation of state-society relations under tsarism as she reconstructs the role that a peripheral region played in attempting to define the essential characteristics of the Russian people and their state.

"In this excellent and valuable book, Faith Hillis explores the creation of a 'Little Russian' identity and how nationalist forces were unleashed in Ukraine's right bank in the late imperial period. This idea is conceptualised as one that celebrated both Slavic unity and local identity. Going beyond the standard depictions of a conflict between liberal and illiberal political forces in the late imperial period, a new approach is suggested to understand 'how residents of the right bank came to conceive of local society in national terms in the first place' (p. 10). The study draws on a very wide range of sources, particularly the holdings of the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Kiev, to explore the words and actions of leaders and activists who espoused the Little Russian idea in the late imperial period. Whilst there are many strengths to this work, not least the scope and rigour of the research, perhaps the most novel contribution is to show how a number of activists managed to fuse national with local factors to create a series of movements based around the Little Russian idea that proved remarkably durable, throughout the imperial period and afterwards." ? George Gilbert, *Revolutionary Russia* (2014) "Children of Rus' breaks new ground in research on both Russian and Ukrainian history. It is a must read for everyone interested in empires, borderlands and nationalism, and I am hopeful it will generate a lovely discussion and a lot of new research." ? Serhii Plokhyy, *The Russian* (January 2015) "Well written and chock full of insights into the politics of late Imperial Russia, *Children of Rus'* is a model of meticulous scholarship and perceptive analysis and should be essential reading for anyone interested in learning about the complexities of Russian and Ukrainian identities." ? Robert Weinberg, *The Journal of Modern History* (September 2015) "In this painstakingly researched book, Faith Hillis recovers the largely forgotten yet significant page in the history of the late Imperial Russia: the development of right-wing Russian nationalism on the empire's southwestern edge. In so doing, she challenges several traditional narratives of the late Imperial period." ? Serhy Yekelchuk, *Slavic and East European Journal* (Fall 2015) "In *Children of Rus'*, Faith Hillis establishes the separate identity of a 'Little Russian' ideology that was neither 'Ukrainian' (though sometimes overlapping with it) nor 'centralizing, imperial' (though sometimes allying with Russian patriotism). The activists she describes are not a monolithic organization but are split into at least three separate groups: radical, liberal, and conservative. Hillis well documents the development of these groups from the 1860s through the Duma period and also does a good job of demonstrating the government's ambiguous attitude toward all three at the local and higher levels." ? Theodore R. Weeks, *Southern Illinois University Carbondale*, author of *From Assimilation to Antisemitism: The "Jewish Question" in Poland, 1850–1914* "In the excellent *Children of Rus'*, Faith Hillis examines the fate of what she terms the 'little Russian idea,' the belief that Russia's Southwest (essentially Kiev and its surrounding region) had a particular identity and a particular role to play in the Russian imperial and then Russian national project—and, subsequently, the Ukrainian national project. The book spans the 1830s to the Russian Civil War, which allows Hillis to trace several important intellectual and political currents. It is a well-written and very well-organized work, one that relies on a broad and convincing source base. It should appeal broadly to scholars in Russian imperial history, as well as to scholars of nationalism and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European history." ? Peter Holquist, *University of Pennsylvania*, author of *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* About the Author Faith Hillis is Assistant Professor of Russian History at The University of Chicago.